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ABSTRACT

According to this essay by a visiting scholar from Great Britain, there will always be a debate in democratic societies, about the proper role of morality in fashioning and articulating foreign policy. This ambivalence has been reflected in the uneven approach to the problem exhibited by successive United States administrations. There are two overriding reasons why it is vitally important for the current U.S. administration to persevere with the idea of projecting values as well as power. The first reason has to do with the domestic problems that the Western nations have in constructing a viable world strategy. Publics within Western democracies are less and less content to leave foreign policy to the expertise and whims of established elites. This is why it is necessary to develop a rationale for United States and Western involvement in the world that does not rest exclusively upon determinations of "interest." More likely to gain approval is a policy with a rationale expressed in terms of democratic values and systems on one side and totalitarian values and systems on the other. The second major reason for projecting democratic values is the continuing allure of the idea of democracy in the modern world. The democratic idea and aspiration is still the most precious asset of the West in its adversarial relationship with the Soviet bloc. The battle for hearts and minds can be seen in its most acute and sophisticated form in Western Europe where the focus of debate between East and West is the "peace" issue. The other propaganda area in which the East does surprisingly well is the matter of "economic justice." Among key elites throughout the world there is still a visceral commitment to the view that socialist societies are somehow more just than capitalist societies in distributing goods and services. To counter this, Western propaganda should concentrate its power at its strongest point: its democratic, open society and its political freedoms. (BZ)

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"The Athenians are here, Sire, with an offer to back us with ships, money, arms, and men — and, of course, their usual lectures about democracy."

Drawing by Ed. Fisher; © 1983 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

Advancing Democratic Principles

STEPHEN HASELER

From the time of the Declaration of Independence onwards many Americans have seen in their republic a moral significance for humanity and have viewed its unique democratic development as a kind of standing moral reproach to the rest of the world. Surveying the world scene in this century—tyranny and turmoil in Europe, the emergence of a Soviet Communist empire, the unsavory nature of many of the regimes in the so-called Third World—one finds it difficult to deny the validity of this American sense of civic virtue and easy to understand its continuing hold on both public and elite opinion.

There will always be a debate in democratic societies, as there has been in the United States, about the proper role of morality in fashioning and articulating foreign policy: about the point at which moral concern becomes mere moral posturing, or when moral condemnations harm allies more than adversaries, or when a moralistic determination of foreign policy produces an intellectual tunnel-vision that precludes serious thought about geo-strategic interests. Even in confident nineteenth-century Liberal England there was a serious debate about this question. Disraeli, on the one hand, was annoyed by Gladstone's insistence that all important political questions (including the great problems of foreign policy) could be reduced to clearly defined moral issues. Gladstone, on the other hand, grandly dismissed Disraeli's notion that a choice must lie between varying degrees of expediency; in the words of his biographer, Philip Magnus, he

considered "that men who thought like that were corrupted by the insolence of wealth and privilege."

In the past twenty-five years this ambivalence about the role of morality in foreign policy has been reflected in the uneven approach to the problem exhibited by successive American administrations. Under Kennedy the moral rhetoric was very high and may have led in part to the impasse in Vietnam. Under Nixon and Kissinger there was hardly any moral rhetoric at all, and even an apparent downgrading of an explicit moral dimension. Henry Kissinger has argued that while a nation cannot rest its foreign policy on power alone, "all serious foreign policy . . . begins with maintaining a balance of power—a scope for action, a capacity to affect events and conditions. Without that capacity a nation is reduced to striking empty poses."[1] Under Carter, of course, moral rhetoric and guidance came back in full flower with a human rights emphasis in which the promotion of human rights became the touchstone of foreign policy.

A Democracy Initiative

The Reagan administration has not, as some observers had predicted, overreacted against the disastrous moralism of President Carter. Reagan has in fact emphasized in a more subtle way the centrality of ethics in foreign policy and acknowledged the importance of the ideological struggle. The projection of American values abroad, as part of state policy, was reasserted when President Reagan unveiled his ambitious notion of "Project Democracy" before the British Parliament in June 1982. The President committed himself to the seemingly grandiose notion of attempting to foster throughout the planet the "infrastructure of democracy—the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities—which allows a people to choose their own way, to develop their own culture, to reconcile their own differences through peaceful means."

The initial reaction in Western Europe to this plan was, typically, skepticism. Neophytes masquerading as modern Metternichs produced an array of hand-me-down arguments about how "interests" and "power" rather than values govern the politics of the world. Also present in the reaction were some

more seriously argued propositions, such as the notion that the stage of economic and social development in much of the so-called Third World is such as to make democratic government virtually impossible. The largely negative reaction also included both a very distinctive modern bashfulness about democratic ideals and the standard anti-American animus that both helps determine and is reflected in European neutralism and nuclear pacifism. Some of these less than enthusiastic responses to "Project Democracy" have found their echo in the United States.

Needed: Domestic Support for Foreign Policy

There are, however, two overriding reasons why I, as a European and a democrat, believe it is vitally important for the American administration to persevere with the idea of projecting values as well as power. The first has to do with the domestic problems that the Western nations have in constructing a viable world strategy. Democratic societies need to marshall a domestic consensus, or at the very least significant public support, for foreign policy objectives. This is difficult to do without explanations, usually of a moral or ideological kind. Publics within Western democracies are less and less content to leave foreign policy to the expertise and whims of established elites. They are unwilling to have it announced, on their behalf, what some often hastily determined "national interest" dictates should be done, particularly when declared "national interests" seem to change with every change of administration.

A policy that an administration or foreign policy establishment decides is "in the national interest" normally becomes the subject of internal debate. Such a debate was certainly generated when the U.S. administration declared its "interests" to be "vital" in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam conflict and in the Persian Gulf region after the fall of the Shah, and now the debate flourishes over Central America. This is why it is necessary to develop a rationale for American and Western involvement in the world that does not rest exclusively upon determinations of "interest." Much more likely to gain approval is a policy whose rationale is expressed in terms of democratic values and systems on the one side and totalitarian values and systems on the other.

Such a formulation not only is broadly congruent to the reality of world politics but also is easily understandable.

The evocation of "democracy" at the very least increases the chances of obtaining bipartisan support at home. If the parties cannot agree upon the need for the projection of democratic values, then they cannot agree upon anything. Those who do not wish to see Western governments actively campaigning for democratic standards and development should be asked: Why not? Their reply may be that it is not the government's proper role to become involved in ideological struggles. But as it is abundantly clear that the Soviet regime so involves itself, this fastidious position can fairly and properly be attacked as an act of unilateral disarmament. Of course, our engagement in the war of ideas and values must not extend to interference in the internal affairs of other sovereign states, or to the use of disinformation.

The projection of democratic values as an important part of U.S. foreign policy need not lead, as some fear it might, to a narrow and retrenched American international policy, one prepared only to defend and assist the "islands of democracy" left on the planet. There is no necessary connection between a sound democratic ideological offensive against totalitarianism and this narrow geo-strategic perspective. Any nation that has the potential for democratic development, no matter how latent, and is an ally of the West need not fear for itself in this kind of environment. Nor need a new democracy initiative imply that America's allies around the world will be subject to the kind of public scolding that went on during the Carter years.

One of the crucial ingredients in the ability of Britain to wage a successful armed conflict in the South Atlantic in 1982 was indeed the evocation by Prime Minister Thatcher of traditional democratic values as a justification for the projection and use of power. A domestic consensus was established behind the British use of force in that sad conflict mainly because of the unimpeachable moral high ground gained by Her Majesty's Government in declaring the issue at stake one of "democratic self-determination." As President Reagan said about British soldiers in the Falklands in his speech to the British Parliament:

". . . those young men aren't fighting for mere real estate. They fight for a cause, for the belief that armed aggression must not be allowed to succeed and that people must participate in the decisions of government under the rule of law."

In an incisive article in 1976 entitled "Morality and American Foreign Policy,"[2] Paul Seabury focused upon the fact that democratic societies need to marshall domestic support for anything other than very short-term foreign policy objectives. He argues that while only a few make policy, "a difficulty arises when attempts to justify and explain the uses of power strike no responsive chord in the public." Western political leaders must accept the fact that democracy places severe constraints upon their ability to use power in defense of their systems.

Historically, a common sense of impending danger has usually served to unite Western publics behind leaders who acted with resolution. One of the problems with the United States is that the sheer size of the North American continent together with its perceived relative self-sufficiency works against a sense of common danger, no matter what genuine threats to America's "interests" may be occurring, even in its own hemisphere. Americans tend to be complacent about anything short of a Pearl Harbor. Consequently the use of values and standards—democratic values and standards—to justify action becomes an imperative. Seabury concludes his article aptly by suggesting that the American administration should as part of its public diplomacy "speak to American minds and hearts with reminders of the high stakes and costs for an American free society in a world where, for better or worse, it is far from omnipotent, yet perhaps one of man's best hopes."

Democratic Values: The Greatest Asset Abroad

The second major reason for projecting democratic values is the continuing allure of the idea of democracy in the modern world. The democratic idea and aspiration is still the most precious asset of the West in its adversary relationship with the Soviet bloc. One reason why the United States has been losing the propaganda battle with the Soviet Union—not only in the

Third World but in Europe too—is that it has tended to undervalue this asset and has allowed Moscow to undervalue and also distort it.

Marxism-Leninism may indeed be on the ash heap of history. No serious person within the Eastern bloc, even among the ruling elites, believes in this tawdry philosophy. It is irrelevant to the needs and aspirations of the less developed world. It no longer holds the imagination of the Western young, and Western intellectuals now find it unsatisfactory.

In this environment it is a veritable feat for the West to be losing the propaganda war. Yet it is doing so, and for reasons directly connected to its coyness about using its democratic heritage as a weapon. Because the West is bashful about intelligent evangelizing for democracy, the battle of ideas between East and West has been carried forward on territory distinctly unfavorable to the West.

The Peace Debate

The battle for hearts and minds can at this time be seen in its most acute and sophisticated form in Western Europe, where the focus of debate between East and West is the "peace" issue. For a number of peculiar reasons, most having to do with the changing political and intellectual mood in Western Europe, the United States is not the dominant contender in this debate. The United States is not losing the "peace" battle, but the contest is strangely even. Despite the history of Soviet expansionism since World War II and the blatant invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviets have still managed, with their various "peace offensives," to help create the impression among key sectors of opinion that both superpowers are equally dangerous and threatening to world peace. Of course, there was already in existence a body of opinion that wanted to believe such a message.

An additional difficulty in the "peace war" is presented by the NATO decision of 1979 to deploy modernized theater nuclear weapons (in the absence of a sensible arms control agreement) and the subsequent American defense build-up. Both are obviously attempts to return to a more balanced status quo. Yet this necessary geo-strategic renewal by the West can easily be de-

picted as both destabilizing and threatening to the peace. The zero-zero proposals (the U.S. offer to deploy no intermediate-range missiles in Europe if the Soviets remove theirs), supplemented by American offers to reach an "interim agreement" on the theater nuclear balance in Europe, have decidedly helped Washington in the "peace debate." Even so, the United States will continue to have to fight a rearguard action, at a highly sophisticated level, in projecting itself as the genuine advocate of peace.

The Debate Over Economic Justice

The other propaganda area in which the East, with the help of its supporters and intellectual fellow travelers, does surprisingly well is the matter of "economic justice." Among key elites throughout the world there is still a visceral commitment to the view that socialist societies are somehow more just than capitalist societies in distributing goods and services. There is also a continuing moral problem about capitalism: many members of the younger generation are still not convinced that the ethical standards in modern capitalist societies are, in any absolute sense, superior to those in command economies. The intellectual ascendancy and confidence of free-market economists that has developed during the last ten years or so has not, outside of the United States itself, had a great influence upon the rest of the intelligentsia, let alone the general public. This too places the United States not at a disadvantage but in an equal position to its adversary in the debate.

The problem is compounded by the very openness of American society, which frequently through its internal debate displays to the world (often an all too eager world) the abuses—social and moral—of American and Western society without placing them within the broader picture.

None of this is meant to suggest that American and Western political leaders should disentangle themselves from the debates over peace and economic justice. To do so would be an act of abdication. What they should do is to take a stronger stand by making better use of their assets. Much more should be made of the fact that United States, unlike its adversary, does not domi-

nate its allies either militarily or politically; that the United States, when it possessed a nuclear monopoly, did not use this as a threat to cow the Soviet Union into political or economic submission; and that Western economic systems not only are more productive than any other economic systems developed by mankind but also distribute what they produce more widely and fairly—and are also the only source of credit for the less developed world.

A Consensus to Build On

Western propaganda should concentrate its power at its strongest point. Unquestionably, America's most powerful asset among the younger generation in Western Europe is its democratic, open society and its political freedoms. In an intriguing analysis of this,[3] Stephen Szabo suggests that this "successor generation" in Europe (which is important because it not only affects American domestic opinion but also is influential among "Third World" elites) is decidedly less pro-American than the older generation of West Europeans, often described as the "founder [of NATO] generation." Young Europeans, he argues, have grown up in an environment in which NATO, affluence, and political stability are givens. The cold war and West European reconstruction are not part of their formative experience, and "they are less likely to defer to established political leadership . . . and more likely to share a critical or neo-Marxist attitude on domestic and international issues."

Yet Szabo noticed, in looking at opinion data (and I can confirm this through personal experience), that no matter what the confusion of social, economic, and defense questions, "young Europeans of all educational backgrounds still recognize a substantial contrast between Soviet and American societies. America continues to be viewed as a more democratic and open society, despite its many perceived flaws in the area of social and racial inequalities and violence. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, is seen as repressive, bureaucratic, and boring."

That the United States is the party of democracy and freedom is simply not open to contest or serious rebuttal, whether the constituency be the young in America's allied nations, the popu-

lations in the half-Finlandized parts of the globe, peoples within the Eastern bloc itself, or the multitudes in the less developed world. What I suggest here is that American and Western public diplomacy and rhetoric build more effectively upon this solid existing consensus. To do so is essential if the West is to compete successfully with its adversaries in the battle of ideas.

There will be those who continue to deny the validity and power of the role of ideas in world politics. I call the attention of these skeptics to the extraordinary success of a small group of evangelists for the secular religion of Fabian Socialism, which held court in Britain at the beginning of this century. One of them, Beatrice Webb, once argued with breathtaking certitude that "with the London School of Economics as the teaching body, the Fabian Society as the propagandist organization, the London County Council as an object lesson in electoral success, no young man or woman who is anxious to study or work in public affairs can fail to come under our influence." And because many of these young people were so influenced, the whole axis of social and political thought throughout the West and the Third World was tilted. Ruthlessly and intelligently this band of believers used its access to the publishing houses, the universities and schools, and the developing mediums of radio and television to spread the message.

To believe that in the last quarter of the twentieth century Americans with their vastly superior resources, high technology and sophisticated communications, and the powerful ideology of democracy cannot replicate such success is sheer defeatism.

Notes

1. See Ernest W. Lefever, ed., *Morality and Foreign Policy: A Symposium on President Carter's Stance* (Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1977). Note especially Henry Kissinger's essay, "Morality and Power," pp. 59-66.
2. Paul Seabury, "The Moral Purposes and Philosophical Bases of American Foreign Policy," *Orbis*, Spring 1976.
3. *Public Opinion*, February-March 1983.

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